

# Our principles for helping people to find information

There are many ways to describe what better information might look like so we decided to describe some things that really help and really hinder our use of information. Our hope is that this can guide those who want to improve the experiences of seeking and providing important information.

While some of these points may seem obvious, they are included here because the challenges they describe are regularly encountered.

## Principle 1:

### Enable people to easily search for information

You can do this by **Always...**

- Keeping things simple and to the point
- Keeping findability in mind when setting up a new digital service – if it can't be found people won't easily discover it
- Offering multiple comms channels – email, phone, web and consider different public places to spread analogue information
- Offering a person to speak to if you can
- Considering how people who speak other languages will use your information
- Testing your information with people who haven't been involved in creating it – ideally, those who will be using it and those who are already disadvantaged by poor information access.

And **Never...**

- Underestimating the power of word of mouth. Can your information also be easily described in conversation?
- Leaving people at a 'dead end'
  - where they have no option to continue their search nor a way back
  - Dead links mean they can look no further
  - No contact details to ask for further help

#### **For example:**

A resident described phone support that taught her how to use her phone to show the technical problem she had using video in real time. The problem was solved quickly, she learned a new skill and the service provider was able to provide exactly the help needed.

### Principle 2:

#### Help people to choose the best source

Having searched and discovered a range of sources to explore further, support people to choose the one that works for them by **always** reassuring people that they can trust the source. For example, most people know and trust the phone numbers 999, 101 and 111 and the support to expect when they call. Is there an equivalent for your information?

### Principle 3

#### Help people to navigate to the right information

Even using a trusted source doesn't guarantee that people will find the information they need. Support people to easily find their way to what they need by:

##### **Always...**

- Presenting information and options in a way that is meaningful and not overwhelming.
- Offering options to filter if possible so that large amounts of information feel more manageable

And **never** overcomplicating information with unnecessary visual 'noise'

### Principle 4

#### Accessing information

Having found their way to where the answer might be, support people to access and understand the information they are seeking by **always...**

- Ensuring that information at the end of a search is up to date, accurate and comprehensible.
- Designing to ensure that language and presentation is clear and legible and there are options to increase sizes or access in different ways.
- Making information readily available, avoiding the need to create an account to access it if possible.

And **never** putting large amounts of information in one place without structure or navigation.

# Our principles for helping people to **provide** information

We collect information over the phone, by email, online forms, paper forms, official application forms. **Form filling** is probably one of the biggest frustrations for people. Booking a service, claiming something, buying something. The stuff we do everyday.

We discussed things that could make providing information easier, including **always...**

- Confirming that this is the correct form by describing what and who it's for. Make it easy for people to check if they aren't sure.
- Joining up information behind the scenes if possible - don't unnecessarily collect information and ask people to give the same information time and time again.
- Helping those you're asking to understand where the information collection fits into a wider process. Is this a first draft and you can change things later? Or are they important statements that will influence an outcome?
- Giving people the time they need. We all have different reading speeds, information skills and abilities to find and recall the information we need to provide.
  - If there is a time-out, explain why and how to extend it
  - Enable people to save their responses if possible - losing answers because we've gone to look for information is so frustrating.
  - Allow us to complete long forms in stages and save each stage.
- Ensuring that there are no surprises – tell people what you need to know, why you need it and what they will need to do to provide it.
  - Explain the extra information they will need to complete the form and where they can find it.
  - Give a realistic estimate of time it may take to complete
  - Provide a list of questions they will be asked ahead of time
- Designing information collection with intention – does it make sense to the person you are asking? Are the questions in a logical order? Are you using language that is meaningful to the person asking and the person answering?
  - Let us review what we've written. Can we check our answers before we click 'submit'?
- Including an 'other' option or 'comments' because not everyone fits into a set of drop-down options.
- Making multiple alternative formats available (paper, digital, supported by another person)

And **never**

- complicating the form with unnecessary distractions
- Allowing people to lose responses by clicking 'back'!
- Asking for duplicate information or unnecessary information that you already hold (for example on parental consent forms!)

## A Better Experience of Finding and Providing Information – April 2026

A good example of avoiding unnecessary form filling is the [Tell Us Once service](#) - the web page for the service illustrates some of the points we've raised. It tells us:

- When to use Tell Us Once
- How to use Tell Us Once
- Information you may need before using Tell Us Once
- What the service does
- What to do after you've used it